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Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-05s and PE-06s

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Executive Summary

The Human Resources (HR) community across the federal Public Service (FPS), like other functional communities, is facing future staffing challenges with the retirement of older employees. In order to prepare for such workforce changes, a better understanding of the career plans and career development needs of middle and senior PEs was necessary. This report was commissioned by the Human Resources Community Secretariat and is based on research conducted by the Research Directorate of the Public Service Commission. The findings are based on responses by 252 PE-05s and PE-06s over the months of February and March of 2002.

The survey revealed that the PE-05 and PE-06 workforce is extremely stable. A majority of respondents plan to stay in the Public Service (80%) and the HR field (75%) until retirement. Retirement is approaching for this group, with 37% of respondents retiring within five years and another 34% within 6-10 years. The majority of respondents have started both retirement planning (89%) and taken action with regards to their retirement plans (90%).

Respondents' interest in becoming executives bodes well for senior level succession planning. A majority of respondents were somewhat (41%) and very (25%) interested in progressing to the executive level. Respondents interested in becoming executives within three to five years (26%) had a lower average age than those who indicated that they are ready now (44%), highlighting the potential of executive development opportunities. Respondents who were not at all interested in becoming an executive (30%) or did not know whether or not they were interested (4%) chose concerns with work-life balance as the greatest influence on their decision (86%).

The survey results indicate that respondents are not taking full advantage of career development opportunities in the Public Service, which may have implications for executive readiness. Lower than expected numbers of respondents participated in such career development activities as attending a management learning event (51%) or developing a learning plan (48%). While respondents did express strong interest in participating in various development programs, the actual percentage that had applied to any such program was consistently lower than the level of interest.

Respondents saw electronic communications as useful, with close to half selecting HR Connexions and other Internet sites as the most useful way of remaining informed about their career and development opportunities (54%) and HR initiatives (44%). E-mail communication was also seen as useful to career and development opportunities (46%) and HR initiatives (41%).

Finally, the majority of respondents identified managing the implementation of HR modernization (77%) and obtaining resources in order to perform services (60%) as the most significant future challenges in Human Resources Management (HRM). Given these results it is clear that senior PEs are concerned with HR issues that will directly affect the day-to-day environment in which they work.

This report provides an understanding of the career intentions and interests of PE-05s and PE-06s necessary to support the general and executive succession planning required to address the future staffing challenges of the Human Resources community in the federal Public Service.

1.0 Introduction

To better understand the career plans and challenges facing HR staff of the federal Public Service, a census of the middle and senior Personnel Administration (PE) Group and senior Administration Services (AS) Group working in compensation was undertaken in the months of February and March of 2002. Questionnaires were distributed to all eligible respondents, approximately 1163, close to half (578) of who were PE-05s and PE-06s. In total 385 completed questionnaires were received¹ rendering a response rate of 33%. This report focuses on the 252 respondents in PE-05 and PE-06 positions, resulting in a response rate of 44%.

This report addresses three key areas of concern to the senior HR community:

- career plans, including interest in executive positions and retirement
- career development
- perceived challenges facing HR

Senior HR staff have unique attitudes and perceptions on many issues, such as retirement, succession planning and the future challenges of HRM, due to their older average age and considerable work experience. A separate report examines the survey responses of PE-04s², which differ as a result of their own demographic profile. The issues examined in this report build on previous research findings and will contribute significantly to future strategies on succession planning and career development.

1.1 Background

A 1998 Treasury Board Secretariat study revealed that the demographic profile of the HR community is largely comprised of women and older workers. Women constituted 70% of PEs and 84% of ASs³. Both male (32.8%) and female (17.4%) PEs were more likely than the rest of the Public Service (14.1%) to have 25 or more years of pensionable service⁴. During 1993-1998 the average age of PEs increased by 2.5 years from 41.9 to 44.4, surpassing both the average age increase (1.8 years) and the average age (42.3) for the total Public Service⁵.

The average age of PEs has serious implications for retirements. The percentage of PEs identified as eligible to retire between 1998-2008 was 47%, compared to 35% for the total Public Service⁶. The retirement potential will increase for higher occupational levels (i.e. PE-06 or AS-07) due to a higher average age and years of service.

¹ Nine additional surveys were completed by Canada Customs and Revenue Agency staff, but have been filtered out of the sample.

² Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s*.

³ Treasury Board Secretariat (December 1998) *Demographic Study of the Human Resource Community : Personnel Administration Group* at p.7

⁴ IBID at p.22

⁵ IBID at p.14

⁶ IBID at p. 31

The percentage of PEs below 35 years of age (9.1%) was also much lower than the figure for the total Public Service (19.9%)⁷. Steps have been taken since 1998 to address the age demographic of PEs, including the introduction of a Human Resources Development Program (HRDP)⁸. The HRDP has the broad mandate of renewing and developing the HR community across government by supporting a centrally managed recruitment process for external recruits. Participants enter at the PE-01 level and graduate at PE-03 after three years. To date approximately 200 recruits have entered the program. Moreover, there is commitment from 23 departments to hire 100 new PE-01s in the 2001-2002 Post-Secondary Recruitment Program.⁹

Human Resources across the federal government have entered a period of transition. The Task Force on Modernizing Human Resources Management (MHRM), announced by the Prime Minister in April 2001, is focusing on legislative amendments to the HR framework that will likely be tabled in the House of Commons in the fall of 2002. Senior HR personnel will have a large role to play in the successful implementation and staff acceptance of the HR modernization process.

This report provides a current snapshot of the experiences and career plans of senior HR staff, creating a benchmark for future reference and enabling key issue areas for this group to be identified. It is hoped that this survey will contribute to the generation of ideas on how best to approach identified areas of concern.

⁷ IBID at p.14

⁸ To find out more about this program see http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/hr_connexions_rh/sigs/hracs/renewal_initiatives/hr_prof_dev_prog/hrdpnr_e.html

⁹ Human Resources Community Secretariat, *Creating Synergy*, April 2002.

2.0 Methodology

The Personnel Community Survey was administered over a three-week period in the months of February and March 2002. The Research Directorate of the Public Service Commission was commissioned by the Human Resource Community Secretariat (HRCS) to design, in consultation with HRCS, and analyse the survey. The questionnaire was composed of some 59 items covering a wide range of issues, including participants' interests in becoming executives, their retirement plans, and career development needs.

The survey was conducted over the Internet and by mail. The Ipsos-Reid polling firm, under contract with the Public Service Commission, administered the web-based survey. Potential respondents were sent letters of invitation by electronic mail soliciting them to participate in the survey, as well as providing the Internet address of the survey and personal identification numbers (PIN) to access the questionnaire. Additional reminder notices were sent by e-mail.

The Research Directorate conducted the distribution and administration of the paper version of the survey. All potential respondents were sent letters of invitation by e-mail soliciting them to participate in the survey.

2.1 Population and Census

The census population consists of all federal public servants occupying fourth, fifth and sixth level positions in the Personnel Administration Group (PE) and fifth, sixth and seventh level positions in the Administrative Services Group (AS) working in the compensation sector. A census of these classification groups and levels, subject to the Public Service Employment Act, was attempted in order to identify all the mail and e-mail addresses for the purpose of the survey administration. Due to the difficulty of maintaining current employee lists, and especially e-mail addresses, only 1163 public servants with identified addresses were invited to participate in the survey.

2.2 Survey Respondent Profile

This report examines the attitudes and experiences of the 252 senior PE respondents (excluding those in compensation). Of this total, 156 (62%) are PE-05s and 96 (38%) are PE-06s.

The gender composition of this group is largely female; 64% of respondents are women and 36% are men. This is a very high level of female representation compared to the *Survey of Managers and Professionals* (36%), which included a sample of PE-05 and PE-06 respondents, conducted by the Research Directorate in the winter of 2002¹⁰.

Over half of respondents (58%) identified English as their first official language and the remainder (42%) identified French as their first official language. Employment equity group representation was the following: Aboriginal persons (4%), visible minorities (3%) and persons with disabilities (10%). The employment equity group representation of PE-04s is similar for

¹⁰ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal* at <http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/research/>

Aboriginal persons (3%) and persons with disabilities (9%), but much higher for visible minorities (7%)¹¹.

The majority of respondents are between 45-55 years old (62%). The average age for both PE-05s and PE-06s was 49, higher than the average age of PE-04s (47)¹². Of those who indicated their year of birth, 63 or 26% were between the ages of 45 and 49. Almost twice that proportion (n=103 or 42%) of respondents were between the ages of 50 and 55. The next largest age group is 35-44 year olds, who make up 21% of respondents. This age profile is reflected in retirement plans. Fully 34% of respondents plan to retire within the next 5 years, with another 31% retiring within 6-10 years.

Respondents have worked an average of 24 years in the federal Public Service. This is higher than the average of 18 years worked by respondents, excluding PEs, of the *Survey of Managers and Professionals*¹³. Most respondents have a Bachelor's degree (46%), followed by a Master's degree (18%) and a high school diploma (14%).

¹¹ Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s*.

¹² IBID

¹³ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*.

3.0 Results

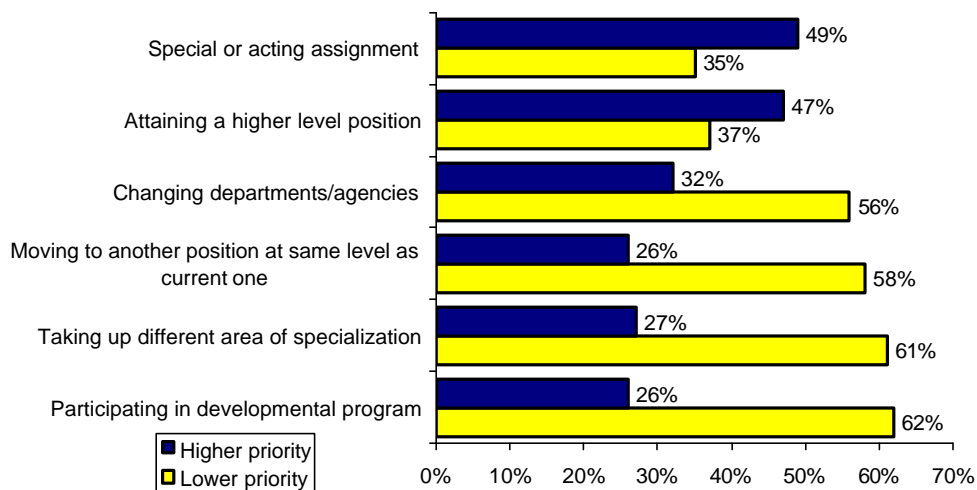
3.1 Career Plans

The future career plans of PE-05s and PE-06s have important implications for both executive and general succession planning across the human resource management field. The degree of executive interest and readiness, intentions to remain in HR, retirement plans and PS retention were all assessed in order to provide a comprehensive picture of this group's immediate and long-term work plans.

The general career plans of respondents were assessed by asking how much of a priority, over the next three years, they will place on six career goals (Graph 1). Close to half of all respondents indicated that taking a special or acting assignment for development purposes (49%) and attaining a higher level position (47%) is a higher priority. These results are fairly consistent with the responses from managers and professionals across the Public Service who indicated attaining a higher level position (54%) and taking a special or acting assignment (43%) a higher priority¹⁴.

A majority of respondents saw changing departments or agencies (56%), moving to another position at the same level (58%), taking up a different area of specialization (61%), and participating in a development program (62%) as a lower priority.

Graph 1: Priority placed on various career goals (n=252)



3.1.1 Executive Interest

The degree of interest and readiness in becoming an executive among respondents is an indicator that will help with executive succession planning.

A large proportion of respondents (66%) indicated that they were somewhat interested (41%) or very interested (25%) in progressing to the executive level. The *Survey of Managers and Professionals* had only a slightly higher level of somewhat and very interested respondents (71%)

¹⁴ IBID

n=1685)¹⁵. Among PE-05 and PE-06s, less than a third (30%) were not at all interested and 4% did not know whether they were interested or not. A greater percentage of PE-04s (50%) were not interested in advancing to executive positions or did not know (7%), while (43%) expressed interest in becoming executives¹⁶. This finding is surprising given the lower average age among PE-04s.

Interest in attaining an executive position decreased with age among PE-05s and PE-06s: respondents who were very interested were on average 46 years of age, while those who were somewhat interested were 48. In contrast, those not at all interested had an average age of 52. These results may be due to the fact that older respondents are closer to retirement and are thus, less likely to aspire to executive positions. Succession planning strategies, as a consequence, may want to consider including those in their late forties or younger in their target population.

Of the respondents who indicated that they were somewhat or very interested in becoming executives, a large number indicated they are ready now to work at the executive level (44%). One quarter (25%) of those interested believe that they would be ready in one to two years and 26% feel that they would be ready in three to five years. We find an association between age and readiness that is the opposite from the above finding. Those who say that they are ready now are an average age of 49; whereas, those who believe they will be ready in three to five years are 43 years of age on average. These results bode well for executive succession planning, highlighting the existence of an older cohort who believes they are ready to assume executive positions now. This age profile also demonstrates that younger respondents interested in executive positions have realistically evaluated their own readiness and could serve as a potential target group in terms of future development.

There is definite executive interest among respondents, with the majority expressing that they were somewhat or very interested in progressing to that level. Additional questions examined the reasons behind the interest, or lack thereof, in executive positions.

Respondents interested in becoming executives were asked to indicate to what extent nine factors had influenced their level of interest (Graph 2). Greater influence was attached to the reasons: opportunity to influence progress towards a goal (90%) and opportunity to participate in senior level decision-making (88%). These findings are similar to the results of the PE-04 report where 88% chose the opportunity to influence progress towards a goal and 82% the opportunity to participate in senior level decision-making¹⁷. These responses were only slightly higher than those found in the overall results from the *Survey of Managers and Professionals* where 89% selected the opportunity to influence progress towards a goal and 85% chose the opportunity to participate in senior level decision-making as influences¹⁸. Least likely to influence respondents' interest in becoming an executive is the opportunity to earn more money (56%) and do more interesting work (68%).

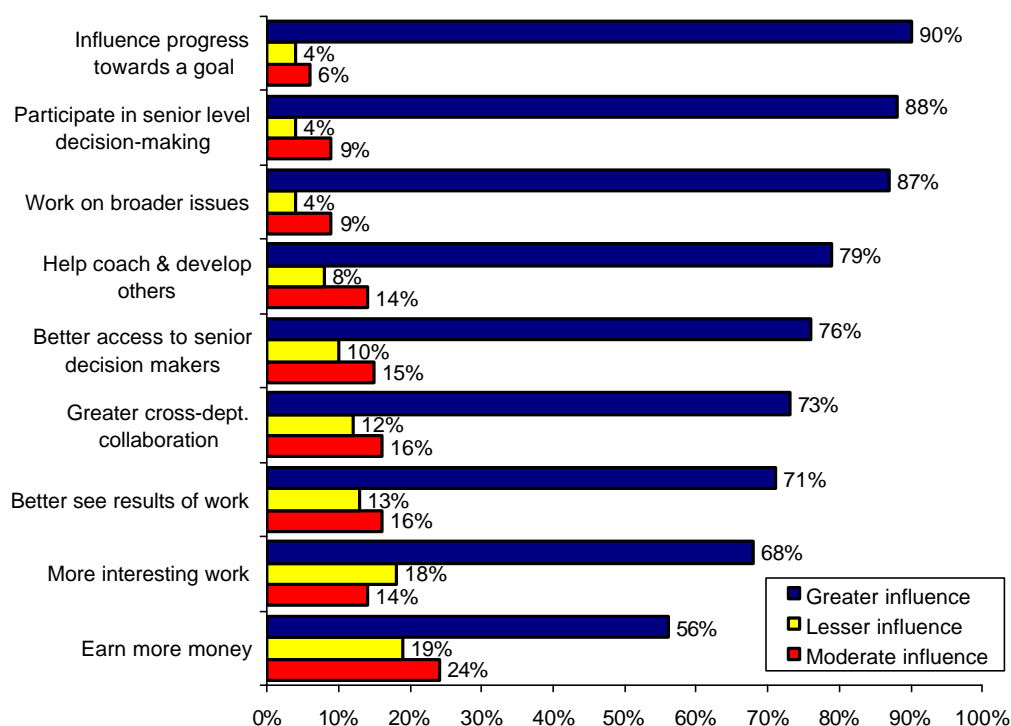
¹⁵ IBID

¹⁶ Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s*.

¹⁷ IBID

¹⁸ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*.

Graph 2:
Extent of influence of various factors on becoming an executive (n=164)



Respondents who were not at all interested in becoming an executive or did not know whether or not they were interested were asked to indicate to what extent certain factors influenced their decision (Graph 3). The greatest influence in deciding not to become an executive is concern with work-life balance (86%). This percent was lower than the response rate for PE-04s (92%)¹⁹, but higher than for managers and professionals across the Public Service (77%)²⁰. This issue has received increased attention in recent years among social science researchers, including Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins who have undertaken work-life balance studies and maintain that high work-life conflict not only negatively impacts the employee, but also the employee's colleagues, family and employer²¹.

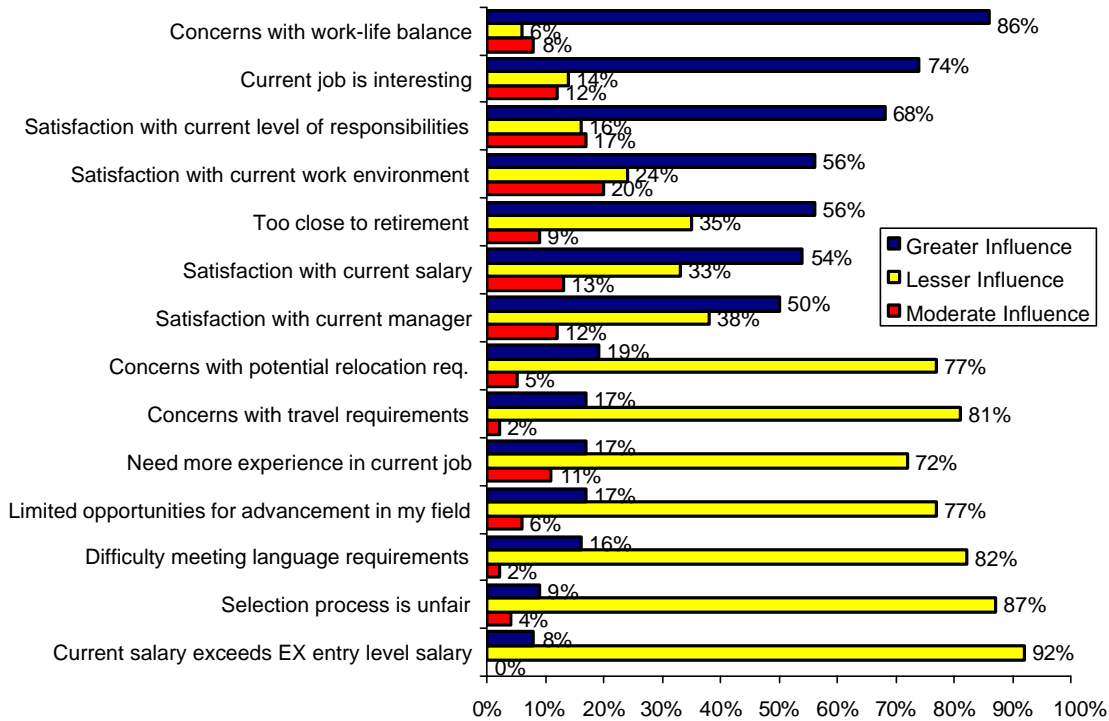
Other important factors are: current job is interesting (74%), satisfaction with current level of responsibilities (68%), satisfaction with current working environment (56%), being too close to retirement (56%), satisfaction with current salary (54%) and satisfaction with current manager (50%). Factors that have less of an impact on the decision not to become an executive include, current salary exceeding entry EX salary (8%) and perception of the selection process as unfair (9%). The results indicate that respondents who were not at all interested in becoming an executive or did not know whether or not they were interested have been influenced in their decision by concerns about executive position pressures and satisfaction with current positions.

¹⁹ Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s*.

²⁰ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*.

²¹ Duxbury, Linda and Higgins, Chris (October 2001) *Work-life Balance in the New Millennium: Where are we? Where do we need to go?*

Graph 3: Extent of influence of various factors on decision not to become an executive (N=85)



Approaching the issue of executive succession from a functional angle, the survey explored the issue of becoming an executive in HR. Respondents were asked to select three of eleven elements they saw as most important in becoming an executive in HR. Over half of respondents identified the following: very good leadership skills (59%), comprehensive experience in the HR field (55%) and considerable management skills (54%). Elements that were seen as less important contributors to becoming a HR executive are knowledge of financial management in the PS (2%), a university degree (9%) and executive experience outside of the HR field (9%). These results indicate that respondents' perceptions may or may not be in line with the actual skills needed to become an executive.

3.1.2 Human Resources Field

Survey respondents were asked about their intentions to remain in the HR field.²² Of the 189 respondents who indicated the length they intend to remain in the field, 52% (n=98) said they plan to remain for between one and five more years (Table 1).

²² One quarter (25% or 63 people) of respondents did not reply to this question.

Table 1:
Duration of which respondents plan to remain in the HR field in the FPS

Time frame	Percent (number)
Less than one year	6 (11)
1 to 5 years	52 (98)
6 to 10 years	30 (57)
11 to 15 years	7 (13)
16+ years	5 (10)
Total	100 (189)

As one would expect, those who are older are more likely to be leaving in the next five years. The average age of those leaving the HR field within five years is 52 compared to those who plan to leave in 6 to 10 years who are an average age of 49. These results indicate that the exit from the field will be due to retirement rather than to other reasons.

3.1.3 Retirement

An overwhelming majority (80%) of respondents plan to stay in the Public Service until they retire. A very small proportion (6% or 16 respondents) indicated that they were leaving the FPS for reasons other than retirement. Interestingly, 14% (n=34) of respondents indicated “don’t know” to this question. Moreover, as one would expect there is an association between age and intentions to leave. For instance, those who plan to leave for reasons other than retirement are an average age of 46, whereas, those who are leaving due to retirement are an average age of 50. Those who are unsure are an average age of 44. This tells us that the closer one is to retirement the more likely one is to leave due to retirement rather than other reasons. Similarly, younger individuals are less sure of their intentions because retirement as an event is at a greater distance in the future for them.

Respondents were asked to indicate in how many years they intend to retire, with an average of 9 years indicated by respondents. This is just one year less than the average years until retirement for PE-04s (10)²³. Within 5 years 37% (n=86) of PE-05s and PE-06s plan to retire, and another 34% (n=78) plan to do so within 6 to 10 years. There is no difference in retirement plans according to gender.

In terms of planning, most respondents have done some (68%) or a lot (21%) of retirement planning. Similar proportions of respondents have taken some action (70%) or a lot of action with regard to their retirement plans (20%). Respondents were also asked to what extent they feel their employer has a role in assisting with retirement planning. The majority felt that the employer has some role to play (66%), followed by no role (21%) and a large role (13%).

The survey results indicate that over the next 5 to 10 years the FPS will witness a major departure of senior PEs. The high levels for both retirement planning and action taken by respondents suggest that respondents are likely to retire according to schedule.

²³ Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s*.

3.1.4 Retention

A very small proportion of respondents indicated the intention to leave the Public Service for reasons other than retirement (6%, n=16). An even larger minority (14%) was uncertain of whether or not they intend to leave the Public Service for reasons other than retirement. This workforce is fairly stable, particularly in comparison to managers and professionals across the Public Service who are more likely to leave for reasons other than retirement (10%) or express uncertainty over whether or not they will leave before retirement (24% n=641)²⁴. The PE-04 workforce also had higher levels of intentions to leave the Public Service for reasons other than retirement (11%) and uncertainty on this issue (16%)²⁵.

The group expressing uncertainty in their reasons for leaving represent a potential pool of lost employees. As mentioned above, this group has a lower average age (44) than those planning to leave before retirement and those not planning to leave before retirement. This finding is consistent with the results of the *Survey of Managers and Professionals* that found that respondents, excluding PEs, who were unsure about leaving had the lowest average age (43). In other words, the younger a respondent is the less certain one is of his or her intentions to stay in the FPS.

A considerable majority of respondents plan to stay in the FPS until retirement, however an important minority is uncertain as to their intentions to remain in the Public Service. The long-term implications of losing this latter group of employees, especially in terms of succession planning, is worthy of consideration for HR planning and policy advisors.

3.2 Career Development

3.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

The survey examined the roles and responsibilities respondents want managers and the HR community to take in their career development. This information may be used to design or strengthen career development tools to better meet the needs of senior PEs.

Respondents were asked how important it is for HR managers/leaders to take on certain roles in assisting in the attainment of management or executive positions. The majority of respondents felt that managers have an important or very important role to play in all five activities. The top two activities were providing career development feedback and advice (91%) and actively coaching employees (87%). The remaining three activities involved promoting organizational commitment to career advancement (85%), establishing development initiatives for middle managers (85%) and dedicating more resources for training and development (84%). The high levels of the findings indicate that a number of avenues could be pursued and would be positively received by this group with regards to management or executive development.

The role of the HR Community in career development was also assessed. Respondents were asked to choose three leadership competencies, from a list of fourteen, that the HR Community should emphasize in training in order to help respondents achieve management positions. The

²⁴ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal.*

²⁵ Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s.*

three most often selected competencies were action management (44%), visioning (34%) and ethics and values (31%). Competencies that were seen as least important to emphasize through training were personality (3%) and self-confidence (10%).

3.2.2 Development Activities

This survey has examined respondents’ career plans, competencies and other issues. Now, we turn our attention to the areas that they see as needing improvement. Specifically, respondents were asked to rate the extent they need to work on certain skills in order for their career to develop. Table 2 itemizes the 12 areas and indicates how respondents saw them as playing a role in their career development.

Table 2: Career development areas

Career development items	Greater extent Percent (number)
Improve my knowledge of working at the political level	53% (128)
Improve my project management skills	42% (102)
Improve my leadership skills	42% (101)
Improve my policy development skills	41% (97)
Improve my financial management skills	38% (92)
Learn or improve my knowledge of my second official language	33% (81)
Improve my ability to communicate my ideas easily	29% (70)
Improve my time management skills	24% (57)
Further my formal education	16% (38)
Learn more about providing services to clients	14% (34)
Learn to use job-related software	14% (34)
Learn more about career planning	12% (30)

The top three areas for improvement are knowledge of working at the political level (53%), project management skills (42%) and leadership skills (42%). Improving one’s knowledge of working at the political level (54%) was also the most important area of improvement for respondents of the *Survey of Managers and Professionals*. As well, those respondents were more interested in learning about career planning (28%), improving time management skills (32%) and effective communication (35%). It is interesting to note the low response to “learn or improve my knowledge of my second official language” (33%) as compared to the managers and professionals across the Public Service (51%)²⁶, indicating a high degree of bilingualism among senior PEs.

Related to the issues raised above, respondents were provided with a list of activities and asked to select three that they believed would be most beneficial to their professional and personal development skills. The most frequently selected items were the following: work assignment (54%), internal government training (46%) and greater opportunity to work closely with executives (37%). Less important items included university or college training (20%).

²⁶ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*.

A more focussed approach to this issue was also taken in the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate if they participated or are currently participating in a variety of activities to help with their career development (Table 3). Over half (51%) of respondents had participated in a management learning event (i.e. presentation or workshop about improving their ability to manage). This is surprisingly lower than expected given that these opportunities are so widely available and that 61% (n=154) of respondents manage or supervise employees. In contrast, just less than half of this group has developed a personal learning plan (48%) or developed a personal competency profile (48%). While these results are lower than expected, they are consistently higher than the findings for the *Survey of Managers and Professionals* that found only 40% participated in a management learning event²⁷.

Table 3: Levels of participation in various career development activities

Career development activity	Percent (number)
Attended a management learning event (i.e. presentation or workshop about improving your ability to manage)	51% (129)
Developed a personal competency profile (i.e. a list of those characteristics that are important for effective performance in your career)	48% (121)
Developed a personal learning plan (e.g. professional development plan with specific learning goals)	48% (120)
Used a self-assessment guide related to management development (e.g. 360° feedback exercise)	39% (98)
Sought the advice of a career development coach (i.e. career counselor, consultant or mentor)	36% (90)
Participated in a formal, in class leadership development program	31% (79)
Participated in an on-line course related to management (i.e. course offered on the Internet or government computer network)	7% (17)

The picture that emerges from these results is not consistent with a strategic approach to career development. Only a minority of respondents has developed a personal competency profile or learning plan, two key elements of career development. While respondents did identify activities that would be beneficial to their career development, such as work assignments, the number was lower than it could be considering the level of executive interest among respondents. Based on these results, it may be valuable to examine if respondents were in fact taking advantage of the learning opportunities that would prepare them for the executive level.

3.2.3 Development Programs

Given the availability of formal development programs in the FPS, the survey included a question on the level of interest in various programs (Table 4). Interestingly, there was a high degree of interest in the International Exchange program (31%, n=74). This result was also reflected in the APEX survey of executives and executive equivalents²⁸. However, PE

²⁷ IBID

²⁸ Christine Minas (2002) *Opportunities and Barriers in the Senior Ranks: Results from the 2001 Association of Professional Executives (APEX) Executive Cadre Retention and Transition Survey* (Ottawa: Research Directorate, Public Service Commission) http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/research/index_e.htm

respondents were consistently less interested in these development programs than respondents of the *Survey of Managers and Professionals*. Interest in the latter survey ranged from 43% in the International Exchange Program to 18% in professional programs²⁹.

Table 4: Proportion of respondents with greater interest in various development programs

Development program	Percent (number)
International Exchange Program	31% (74)
Interchange Canada	31% (74)
Career Assignment Program (CAP)	25% (61)
Special departmental program	21% (45)
Professional program (e.g. CMA)	9% (22)
Assistant Deputy Minister pre-qualified pool	9% (20)

In order to examine actual behavior, respondents were asked to which programs they had previously applied. The greatest proportion of respondents had applied to CAP (10%). Only between one and two percent of respondents had applied to the remaining programs including the International Exchange Program (2%) and Interchange Canada (2%). In these results we see the disparity between interest levels and actual behaviour in the form of applying to programs. In other words, employees may have a strong interest in a program, but do not necessarily pursue participation.

3.3 Communication

This section examines what are the most useful ways for PE-05s and PE-06s to remain informed in two areas; HR initiatives in the FPS in general and career development opportunities. This information is valuable for planning and policy purposes as it highlights numerous crucial areas.

Respondents were asked to select two items from a list of six that they considered to be the most useful ways to remain informed about HR initiatives in the FPS. Just under half (44%) of respondents selected HR Connexions and other Internet websites as one of their two most useful ways of staying informed, compared to over half of all PE-04s (56%)³⁰. A sizable proportion identified inter-departmental committees (43%) and e-mail communication (41%) as useful. Informal workplace conversations were considered less important with only 8% of respondents selecting this item as one of their top two choices.

Along similar lines as above, respondents were asked to select two items from the same list of six which they saw as the most useful in terms of remaining informed about their career and development opportunities. Again, a sizable proportion (54%) of respondents selected HR Connexions and other Internet websites as one of their top two choices. Almost equal proportions of respondents selected e-mail communication (46%) and networking (at community events)

²⁹ *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal.*

³⁰ Francoeur, Daniel; McManus, Brie; and Minas, Christine (April 2002) *Examining the Personnel Community: A Focus on PE-04s.*

(43%). A greater percentage of PE-04s found HR Connexions websites and other Internet sites (56%) useful, while a smaller proportion saw communication by e-mail (39%) as useful³¹.

These findings illustrate the utility of electronic communications in both learning about HR initiatives and career development opportunities. As such, further investments in electronic communications may facilitate greater understanding of issues, programs and policies relevant to PEs.

3.4 Future challenges

Finally, we asked respondents to identify, from a list of seven, the three most important future challenges facing human resources management (HRM). At the top of the list is managing the implementation of HR modernization (77%), which is clearly on the minds of many respondents. This is what one would expect from a group who will be on the front lines as this anticipated transformation takes place. The second most selected item was that of obtaining the resources (human and financial) needed in order to perform their services (60%). The third area that was identified was that of operating in an environment with a lack of qualified PEs (48%). This could be related to the two previous issues, since not having enough PEs on staff may be a concern for the implementation of HR modernization and may be a result of a lack of financial resources. Not surprisingly, the same three future challenges were identified as important for PE-04s, however to a lesser extent³².

Table 5: Respondents' perceptions of the most important future challenges in Human Resources Management (n=252)

Human Resources Management Challenges	Percent
Managing the implementation of HR modernization	77%
Obtaining the resources (human and financial) needed in order to perform our services	60%
Operating in an environment with a lack of qualified PEs	48%
Managing the transition from an operational HR role to an advisory HR role	35%
Redefining our client relationships	25%
Managing an ageing workforce	23%
Redefining union relationships	20%

The responses to the most important future challenges in HR provide an understanding of how respondents perceive their working environment. It is clear that senior PEs are more concerned about those issues that will directly affect the day-to-day environment in which they work, whether due to HR modernization or financial and staff resources.

³¹ IBID

³² IBID

4.0 Conclusion

This report highlights the strengths of the PE-05 and PE-06 workforce, such as their general commitment to working in the Public Service and HRM, their competencies and high levels of experience. However, it also raises issues with long-term implications for the HR field across the FPS. In particular the average age of respondents and their retirement plans - 71% plan to retire within the next ten years - may necessitate the involvement of the HR community in both senior PE and executive succession planning. It will be important to ensure that as PE-05s and PE-06s move into executive positions, a suitable cadre of employees will be ready to assume the positions they have left. As well, executive succession planning should take into account the two streams of respondents interested in executive positions, those older employees who are ready now and the younger employees that will be ready within 5 years. While this report does not examine existing succession planning strategies for HRM, it may be worth further exploring on behalf of HR planners and policy analysts.

While a minority of respondents were not at all interested in becoming executives (30%) or did not know (4%), it may be worth addressing those influencing factors that relate to the perception of what it means to hold an executive position. Many of the factors influencing the decision not to become an executive relate to satisfaction with current job or personal reasons, however a significant majority of respondents were concerned with work-life balance issues. Strategies to demystify the ability of executives to balance work and personal life may give cause to some respondents to rethink their decision not to pursue executive positions.

The lower than expected participation in career development activities, for example only 51% attended a management learning event, should receive further investigation. In particular, it would be important to determine if in fact this group already has the skills necessary to assume management or executive positions. If respondents are found not to possess those skills that are deemed necessary for such positions, the larger HR community may want to strategize around how best to engage this group in development activities and determine why it has been a lower priority in the past. Findings to these questions could influence the design of executive succession programs.

Respondents recognized that a number of future challenges are facing HRM and were most concerned with those likely to have an impact on their day-to-day activities, such as HR modernization (77%). In order to keep respondents informed of HR initiatives, as well as career and development opportunities, the Internet and e-mail should be employed in combination with more traditional communication strategies.

The findings detailed in this report on the career plans and career development activities of the current PE-05 and PE-06 workforce provide a valuable tool on which to base future strategic HR planning. Strategies to address senior PE and executive succession planning could play an important role in ensuring HR service continuity during a time of modernization and unprecedented numbers of retirements across the federal Public Service.